

COVID-19 Vaccine SAVE LIVES Act

Veteran Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

FAQs recently added or updated are highlighted in red.

- [General](#)
- [Vaccine Plan & Implementation](#)
- [Who Can Receive the COVID-19 Vaccine at VA](#)
- [Getting Vaccinated](#)
- [Side Effects](#)
- [Data Sharing](#)

[General](#)

1. Is it possible to get COVID-19 from the vaccine?

No. Currently authorized COVID-19 vaccines, as well as those in development, use inactivated virus, pieces of the virus, or genetic material from the virus. None of these can cause COVID-19.

2. How do the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines work? And since this is the first use of these vaccines, how do we know they will be successful at preventing COVID-19?

Vaccines help train your body's natural immune system to recognize and fight a specific disease by stimulating a response to the virus that causes that disease. mRNA vaccines work by using a piece of a gene from the virus to make proteins that the body's immune system will recognize and make antibodies against.

The vaccines help recipients' immune systems stand guard and fight against any future infection with the COVID-19 virus.

Studies have shown that the authorized vaccines are highly effective in preventing confirmed COVID-19 disease.

3. How does the Janssen COVID-19 vaccine work?

The Janssen COVID-19 vaccine is a viral vector vaccine. Viral vector vaccines contain a modified version of a different virus (the vector) than the one that causes COVID-19. The Janssen vaccine contains a harmless adenovirus vector. This vector enters a cell in the body and then uses the cell's machinery to produce a harmless piece of the COVID-19 virus known as a spike protein. When the cell displays the spike protein on its surface, our immune system recognizes

1

it and it triggers our immune system to begin producing antibodies and preparing other immune cells to fight off any future infection with the COVID-19 virus.

4. Do COVID-19 vaccines affect my DNA?

No. In mRNA vaccines, such as the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines, mRNA never enters the nucleus of the body's cell and does not affect or interact with a person's DNA. The cell breaks down and gets rid of the mRNA soon after it is finished using the instructions.

Viral vector vaccines, such as the Janssen vaccine, do include a piece of genetic material, but it doesn't integrate into a person's DNA.

5. How soon after getting a COVID-19 vaccine will I be protected from COVID-19?

For the two-dose Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines, full protection is achieved 14 days after the second dose of vaccine.

For the single-dose Janssen vaccine, full protection is achieved 14 days after vaccination.

6. After getting the COVID-19 vaccine, will I test positive on a COVID-19 test?

No. Neither the authorized vaccines nor the COVID-19 vaccines currently in clinical trials in the United States can cause you to test positive on viral tests, which are used to see if you have a current infection.

If your body develops an immune response – the goal of vaccination – there is a possibility you may test positive on some antibody tests. Antibody tests indicate whether you have had a previous infection with the COVID-19 virus. Experts are currently looking at how COVID-19 vaccination may affect antibody testing results.

7. Will I have to get vaccinated for COVID-19 again every year, like the flu shot?

It is too soon to know how long protection from COVID-19 vaccines will last. The scientific community continues to research this issue.

8. Were the vaccines tested on people representing a variety of ages, races and ethnicities?

Yes. All COVID-19 vaccines were tested in clinical trials involving tens of thousands of people. Testing with large samples ensures that the vaccines meet safety standards and protect adults of different races, ethnicities, and ages,

2

including adults over the age of 65. About 30% of U.S. participants were Hispanic, African American, Asian or Native American. There were no significant safety concerns identified in these or any other groups.

Vaccine Plan & Implementation

9. Where can I view VA's COVID-19 vaccination plan?

You can find VA's full COVID-19 Vaccine Plan at

<https://www.publichealth.va.gov/docs/n-coronavirus/VHA-COVID-Vaccine-Plan-14Dec2020.pdf>

10. How is VA addressing racial and ethnic disparities in its COVID-19 vaccination program?

VA recognizes that Blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans have a higher risk of contracting COVID-19 and suffering serious or fatal outcomes. VA's COVID-19 vaccination program addresses this disparity in how it prioritizes Veterans with these higher risk factors. That is, the VA does not prioritize vaccination solely based on race/ethnicity, rather, it prioritizes based on COVID-19 risk factors. The VA recognizes that persons of color may decline to be vaccinated based on historic injustices that have diminished their trust in the health care system. The VA is making efforts to reach out to Veterans of color to ensure their concerns are addressed in order to promote their trust in the vaccination program.

Who Can Receive the COVID-19 Vaccine at VA

11. Who is eligible for vaccination at VA?

As authorized by the SAVE LIVES Act, signed into law on March 24, 2021, these groups are now eligible for a COVID-19 vaccination at VA:

All Veterans

- Anyone who served in the U.S. military, to include:
 - National Guard
 - Reserves
 - Coast Guard
- Commissioned members of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration or the U.S. Public Health Service
- Cadets or midshipmen of the U.S. military academies

Spouses of Veterans

- Spouses include:
 - Those in same-sex and common-law marriages

- Widow or widower of a Veteran
- Individuals who characterize their relationship as spousal can receive the vaccine

Caregivers of Veterans

- Family member or friend who:
 - Provides care to a Veteran
 - Helps a Veteran with personal needs like feeding, bathing, or dressing or tasks like shopping or transportation

CHAMPVA Recipients

- Spouses or children of permanently and totally disabled Veterans or of Veterans who have died from service-connected disabilities
- Recipients must meet CDC vaccine age requirements.

12. As a Veteran enrolled in VA care, am I able to get the COVID-19 vaccine through my VA-approved community provider?

Yes, Veterans enrolled in VA care can obtain the COVID-19 vaccine through Community Care Network urgent care and retail pharmacies in accordance with local, state, or territorial vaccination plans. COVID-19 vaccines are provided at no cost to Veterans.

Community care eligible Veterans can identify in-network urgent care facilities and retail pharmacies by using [VA's facility locator](#). Eligible Veterans are encouraged to call the community care provider of choice to ensure the site has vaccines available and to determine if an appointment is available. Veterans are encouraged to download the [pharmacy information card](#) to present at the community care location where the vaccine is being administered.

For all Veterans, as with all health care in the community, Veterans are encouraged to consult local and state resources for COVID-19 vaccination availability and consider the most convenient location for the COVID-19 vaccination.

Getting Vaccinated

13. How will I be notified when I can get the vaccine?

Enrolled Veterans: Your local facility will contact you when they have a COVID-19 vaccine for you.

Veterans, caregivers, spouses and CHAMPVA recipients eligible under the SAVE LIVES Act: Please sign up on the [VA COVID-19 website](#) so we know you are interested in getting vaccinated at VA.

Your facility may invite you to a large vaccination event, like a drive-thru clinic. Or they may ask you to schedule a vaccine appointment. You may receive an invitation by phone, email or text message:

- Text messages will always come from **53079**.
- Emails will always come from a **va.gov** email address.

14. Do enrolled Veterans need to pre-register to get the vaccine?

No. Veterans already enrolled in VA care do not have to pre-register or sign up to receive the vaccine. Staff at each VA facility are using a variety of strategies to reach out to Veterans to discuss the vaccine, ask about their interest in receiving the vaccine and let Veterans know how they can schedule an appointment to be vaccinated.

Many VA facilities are also holding mass vaccination clinics and allowing walk-in vaccinations. Veterans can get the latest information and sign up to receive updates on the [VA COVID-19 website](#).

15. As the FDA has authorized more than one COVID-19 vaccine, will I be able to choose which one I receive?

Most likely, no. Facilities may only have one type of vaccine available. Because the vaccines that are currently authorized are all highly effective at preventing severe COVID-19, hospitalization and death, all Veterans are encouraged to receive the earliest vaccine available to them. If you have concerns about any of the vaccines, we encourage you to discuss your concerns with your health care team or provider.

16. Which VA facilities have COVID-19 vaccines? Does a VA clinic close to where I live have vaccines?

VA is currently distributing vaccines to Medical Centers, Outpatient Clinics and Community-Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs), so it is likely that a VA facility near you is now offering COVID-19 vaccination.

17. What happens if I change my mind and decide I do not want to get the COVID-19 vaccine after scheduling a time to get vaccinated?

5

You can change your mind at any time. We simply ask that you contact your care team as soon as possible so we can offer the vaccine to another eligible individual.

18. What happens if another vaccine provider – such as my state or local health department or a nearby pharmacy – contacts me to schedule a vaccine sooner than VA does? Do I have to go to VA?

We encourage you to get your vaccine at the first opportunity. If you are already scheduled at VA but get an earlier appointment somewhere else and you want to get vaccinated there, please let us know so we can offer the vaccine to another eligible individual.

19. Can Veterans receive the two doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines at different VA facilities or other locations?

Veterans must go to the same facility for both COVID-19 vaccine doses. This is necessary as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) sends second doses of each vaccine to the same VA facility where the first dose was administered. This not only ensures that there are enough doses in each location; it also ensures that Veterans will receive the same vaccine (either the Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna vaccine) for both the first and second dose.

It is important that Veterans receive both doses of the COVID-19 vaccine to be fully effective in protecting against COVID-19 infection. It is also important that Veterans get both doses from the same company, as there are no studies showing effectiveness or side effects when the two doses are from different manufacturers.

Veterans who are moving or relocating and have any questions about their ability to get both vaccine doses at the same location should reach out to their care team **before** getting their first vaccine dose.

Side Effects

20. What are the side effects of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine?

According to the FDA's Emergency Use Authorization for the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, the most common side effects are:

- Fatigue
- Headache
- Muscle aches and pain (myalgia)
- Joint pain (arthralgia)

- Chills
- Injection site pain
- Redness at the injection site
- Fever

For most people, the side effects lasted no more than 48 hours. These side effects are a sign that your immune system is working to build protection against the virus. All participants in clinical trials for the COVID-19 vaccines, experienced similar side effects during the trial phase. Serious adverse events are rare.

There is a remote chance that the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine could cause a severe allergic reaction. A severe allergic reaction would usually occur within a few minutes to one hour after getting a dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine. Signs of a severe allergic reaction can include:

- Difficulty breathing
- Swelling of your face and throat
- A fast heartbeat
- A bad rash all over your body
- Dizziness and weakness

VA is taking precautions to ensure those with a history of a severe allergic reaction to the ingredients in the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, or to the other vaccines, do not receive the vaccine. VA is also ensuring that VA clinicians are fully prepared to respond to a severe allergic reaction post vaccination.

21. What are the side effects of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine?

According to the FDA's Emergency Use Authorization for the Moderna vaccine, the most common side effects are:

- Fatigue
- Headache
- Muscle aches and pain (myalgia)
- Joint pain (arthralgia)
- Chills
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Swelling/tenderness in the armpit
- Injection site pain
- Redness at the injection site

- Fever

For most people, the side effects lasted no more than one to two days. These side effects are a sign that your immune system is working to build protection against the virus. All participants in clinical trials for the COVID-19 vaccines, experienced similar side effects during the trial phase. Serious adverse events were rare.

There is a remote chance that the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine could cause a severe allergic reaction. A severe allergic reaction would usually occur within a few minutes to an hour after getting a dose of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine. Signs of a severe allergic reaction can include:

- Difficulty breathing
- Swelling of your face and throat
- A fast heartbeat
- A bad rash all over your body
- Dizziness and weakness

For most people, the side effects lasted no more than one to two days. These side effects are a sign that your immune system is working to build protection against the virus. All participants in clinical trials for the COVID-19 vaccines, experienced similar side effects during the trial phase. Serious adverse events were rare.

VA is taking precautions to ensure those with a history of a severe allergic reaction to the ingredients in the Moderna vaccine, or to other vaccines, do not receive the vaccine. VA is also ensuring that VA clinicians are fully prepared to respond a severe allergic reaction post vaccination.

22. What are the side effects of the Janssen COVID-19 vaccine?

According to the FDA's Emergency Use Authorization for the Janssen vaccine, the most common side effects are:

- Headache
- Fatigue
- Muscle aches and pain (myalgia)
- Vaccination site pain
- Chills
- Joint pain (arthralgia)

- Cough
- Nasal congestion
- Diarrhea
- Fever
- Vaccination site erythema
- Vaccination site swelling

For most people, the side effects lasted no more than one to two days. These side effects are a sign that your immune system is working to build protection against the virus. All participants in clinical trials for the COVID-19 vaccines, experienced similar side effects during the trial phase. Serious adverse events were rare.

There is a remote chance that the Janssen COVID-19 vaccine could cause a severe allergic reaction. A severe allergic reaction would usually occur within a few minutes to one hour after getting a dose of the Janssen COVID-19 vaccine. Signs of a severe allergic reaction can include:

- Difficulty breathing
- Swelling of your face and throat
- A fast heartbeat
- A bad rash all over your body
- Dizziness and weakness

VA is taking precautions to ensure those with a history of an immediate or severe allergic reaction to the ingredients in the Janssen vaccine do not receive the vaccine. VA is also ensuring that VA clinicians are fully prepared to respond a severe allergic reaction post vaccination.

If you received the Janssen vaccine, contact your healthcare provider and seek medical treatment **immediately** if you develop any of the following symptoms:

- Severe headache
- New or worsening backache
- New neurologic symptoms (e.g., trouble speaking, visual changes, weakness of arm or leg, seizures)
- Severe abdominal pain
- Shortness of breath
- Leg swelling
- Tiny red spots on the skin (petechiae)

- New bruising or easy bruising that is not normal for you.

23. Why did VA pause the use of the Janssen (Johnson & Johnson) COVID-19 vaccine and why did it decide to resume using it?

On April 13, 2021, CDC and FDA recommended pausing use of the Janssen COVID-19 vaccine while they investigated reports of rare and serious blood clots called cerebral venous sinus thrombosis (CVST) in vaccine recipients. This pause was in keeping with the stringent safety monitoring on all COVID-19 vaccine products under emergency use authorization, to allow for review of all safety data and careful consideration for best use.

On April 23, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and U.S. Food and Drug Administration recommended resuming use of the Janssen COVID-19 vaccine. After careful review and evaluation, the FDA and CDC have confidence that this vaccine is safe for use and effective in preventing COVID-19. The available data show that the vaccine's benefits outweigh its risks and the chance of blood clots occurring following its administration is very low.

Following this decision, VA immediately resumed offering the Janssen COVID-19 vaccine to individuals 18 years and older, in accordance with the CDC and the FDA guidance. Anyone who is offered the Janssen vaccine from VA will receive information about the potential risks and benefits of the vaccine, including the rare risk of blood clots and will be made aware of alternative vaccine options. The primary goal of COVID-19 vaccination is to protect those we serve from COVID-19, and VA's priority remains the safety of all those receiving vaccine from VA, including Veterans, their spouses, caregivers, some family members, employees and federal partners.

FDA and CDC will remain vigilant in continuing to investigate the risks of the Janssen vaccine, and VA will continue to monitor safety of the vaccine among Veterans and all others that are vaccinated through VA.

If you have questions about VA's resuming offering the Janssen COVID-19 vaccine, please visit www.va.gov/health-care/covid-19-vaccine/. For more information regarding CDC's recommended pause and resumption of use of the Janssen COVID-19 vaccine, visit <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/safety/JJUpdate.html>.

24. Is a prescription necessary for a vaccine under an Emergency Use Authorization (EUA)?

If EUAs are issued for COVID-19 vaccines, it is expected that those vaccines may be administered without the requirement for an individual prescription for each vaccine recipient from an authorized health care provider. Under an EUA, FDA has an option to waive prescription requirements, if appropriate, depending on the authorized product specifics, authorized use, and/or emergency circumstances. In addition to an EUA, other legal authorities and/or plans may apply to vaccine administration:

- Legal authorities for relevant emergency response agencies (e.g., state, local, tribal and territorial health departments, health care professional licensing boards);
- Standing orders issued by a state health officer or applicable medical control officials or an executive order issued by a governor to authorize certain healthcare providers (e.g., nurses, pharmacists) to administer COVID-19 vaccine;
- State COVID-19 vaccination and emergency response plans; and
- CDC's COVID-19 Vaccination Program.

Data Sharing

25. If I get a COVID-19 vaccine from VA, what data will VA share with the CDC?

We'll share the same information with the CDC that we share for other vaccine. This includes the following information:

- Demographic information (like your age, gender, race, and ethnicity) that helps the CDC understand which groups of people are receiving the vaccine
- Adverse reactions to the vaccine

We will not share names or street addresses.

26. I received a COVID-19 vaccination outside of VA. How do I ensure evidence of this vaccination is incorporated into my VA medical record?

Veterans who wish to have their COVID-19 vaccine reflected in their VA medical record will need to provide evidence of vaccination, such as a completed Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Vaccination Record card, to VA. Veterans can provide this information to their primary care team via secure messaging, during a virtual visit, or in person if they already have a scheduled appointment.

11

27. Why is it important to get evidence of COVID-19 vaccination added to your official medical record?

Voluntarily reporting an outside COVID-19 vaccination to VA will help in many ways, including ensuring the safety of our Veterans, their families, visitors, and staff. It will also help VA have complete, up-to-date medical records for our Veterans; give VA a complete picture of who is protected against the virus; and help us determine the most appropriate course of action for expanding in-person care services.